

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, undated, with transcript

Copy of a letter written by Dr. Bell to Mrs. Bell. (Wednesday morning) Dear May:

I scarcely have the heart to add a morning postscript to this already too long letter. I am afraid I presume a little too much when I fancy you like to read as much as I like to write — so I shall make this Addendum as short as possible. I presume from your yesterday's letter that you are now at home again — where I long to be too. Cambridge looks to me like a fairy dream-home far away in the distance from here — too beautiful almost to be real.

To think that there are any there who care one pin for me seems so extraordinary that I feel very like rushing back by the first train to ascertain whether it is true or not. I only wish I could show in my outward actions how much I love all who are there and how much I feel my own undeservingness of so much kindness and thought.

It is strange that your mother should have touched upon a subject that has been haunting me for some time past — the subject of “conversation”. I think that there is an art in conversation that is worthy of study. It is certainly everybody's duty to learn how to talk so as to interest and entertain others. I often feel like hiding myself away in a corner out of sight — for my inability to converse upon subjects that interest people generally.

Your mother is my admiration in this matter, and I only wish she would let me into her secret. Words seem to flow out of her mouth for everybody — while I can only speak of Electricity or Gravitation or some equally interesting (?) subject.

Whenever I try to say anything I stop all conversation. If there is anything of value in what I say people leave all the talking for me to do - 2 and I don't like it at all. I think it is a real art to interest and entertain people without obtruding oneself and monopolizing all the

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talking. I have been thinking over the subject in a scientific sort of way and I fancy I have got hold of one or two principles that may throw light on the nature of conversation -and may prove of actual use in interesting people and preventing the appearance of that lull in conversation that sometimes occurs when every person coughs and feels uncomfortable and no one seems to be able to throw in a word to break the awkwardness of the silence. I remember one occasion on which your mother was as much at a loss as I was and could not say one word to break my silence! Had it not been for Gertrude's appearance upon the scene just in time I can't imagine what would have happened. I made a little experiment at Uncle David's house the other day and found to my surprise and delight that by interposing a little remark here and there — I could control the current of conversation and turn it in any direction I liked and this too without taking much part myself.

Every person was entirely unconscious of the experiment that was being tried. I thought of some subject I wanted to hear discussed, and tried (without alluding to the subject myself) to lead the conversation in the desired direction. Invariably some one or more of the party would fall into the trap and up would come the very subject I wanted. I am convinced there is something in my theory -and I am going to think it out and see if I cannot apply it in actual conversation. My postscript is assuming gigantic proportions and I better write no more on the subject of "Conversation" or I shall have you breaking our engagement under the plea of cruelty in inflicting such tremendous letters upon you. Love to all at home and ever so much for your dear self.

Your loving, Alec.